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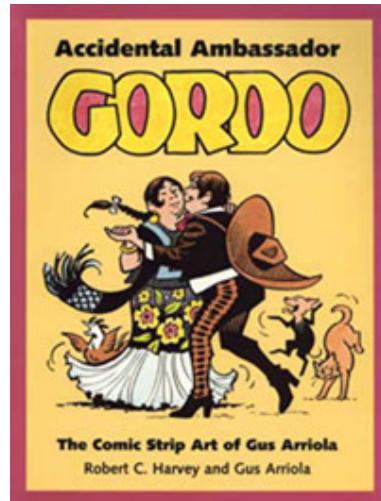
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Accidental Ambassador Gordo The Comic Strip Art of Gus Arriola

By Robert C. Harvey

By Gus Arriola

256 pp., 8 pages of full-color illustrations, 460 b&w cartoon strips

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A biography of the notable Mexican American cartoonist and an appreciative history of his creation



accidental ambassador

GORDO



The comic strip *Gordo* was published in U.S. newspapers for forty-four years (1941-1985). For almost all of this run its creator Gus Arriola was the most visible American of Mexican descent working as a syndicated cartoonist. At its

peak *Gordo* appeared in 270 newspapers and was the more widely circulated and longer-running of only two American comic strips set in Mexico.

Gordo recounted the humorous adventures and amorous preoccupations of a portly Mexican bean farmer, whose name, Gordo, means "fat." Among the supporting cast were his perspicacious nephew, the menagerie of their farm animals, and citizens of their village. Originally, the characters played to the stereotypes of Mexicans as portrayed by Hollywood and in popular culture.

When Arriola realized that in the U.S. his comic strip was the only mass-circulation medium that portrayed Mexicans, he began taking pains to reflect accurately the traditions south of the border. *Gordo* was transformed forthwith, and its chubby hero became, more by accident than by plan, an ambassador for Mexico and its culture.

Converting his protagonist to a tour guide in the 1960s, Arriola was able to regale American readers with many aspects of Mexican folklore, history, and art in an entertaining but informative fashion, winning awards and accolades for his efforts. Because animals and insects in the strip were among its stellar attractions, Arriola was creatively positioned to stump for ecological concerns. He was one of the earliest in popular culture to do so.

Profusely illustrated with runs of the strip from various periods, the book traces Arriola's artistic evolution and celebrates the cartoonist as a supremely inventive stylist whose artwork always



displays design qualities unusual for a comic strip. His stunning Sunday fiestas of color and design are exemplified with eight pages of full-color reproductions.

This is the first book focused exclusively on Gus Arriola and the first that extensively examines the Mexican milieu as portrayed in American comics.

Robert C. Harvey, a comics historian and critic, is a cartoonist who writes for *The Comics Journal*, *Comics Buyers' Guide*, and *Cartoonist PROfiles*. Among his books are *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History* (1994) and *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* (1996). Both are published by the University Press of Mississippi.

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